

VZCZCXRO3614  
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHLB #0232/01 0571634  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 261634Z FEB 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4300  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3513  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3716  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000232

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: PM SINIORA ON GAZA, GHAJAR

REF: BEIRUT 177

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

-----

¶1. (C) During a February 25 meeting with the Ambassador, PM Siniora shared his plans to attend the March 2 Sharm el Sheikh Gaza reconstruction conference. In addition to meeting with other regional leaders on Gaza, Siniora said he also hoped to present the GOL's experiences in Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp reconstruction. He noted that the GOL still had not received the Saudi pledge for that project, adding that the Omanis had recently increased their Nahr al-Barid pledge by two million dollars.

¶2. (C) Siniora also reported that he had not yet received further updates from the Israelis on withdrawal from Ghajar. In response to a question, he added that he would look into whether the GOL was willing to reconvene the Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission, which last met in 1996. According to the PM, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's attempts to boost his popularity were behind recent press claims that the U.S. was interfering in the issue of the Council of the South's budget. Siniora also suspected that Berri's upcoming trip to Tehran was another ploy to increase Berri's popularity and ensure he kept the Speaker's position after the parliamentary elections. Finally, noting "pressure" placed on him to run for a deputy slot in his hometown of Sidon, Siniora was adamant he would not do so, but left the door ajar. End summary.

GCC SHOULD COORDINATE  
ASSISTANCE WITH PA  
-----

¶3. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by PolOff, met Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and his advisor, Roula Nouredine, at the Grand Serail on February 25. Siniora reported that he planned to attend the March 2 Sharm el Sheikh Gaza reconstruction conference. He noted that he heard the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was considering financing Palestinian reconstruction through the Islamic Development Bank. This was not meant to undermine the Palestinian Authority (PA), he argued, but reflected concerns that the PA might be unable to manage reconstruction in Gaza on its own.

14. (C) Citing an unspecified Emirati construction project as an example of direct assistance to the Palestinians that he viewed as not having been entirely successful, Siniora said the best method was to give money directly to the people. However, voicing agreement on the need to support Palestinian PM Salaam Fayad, Siniora then shifted his initial position, declaring, "If some donors wish to fund the PA directly or instead opt to go through a bank, either option is fine as long as the assistance is coordinated with the PA and Salaam Fayad."

15. (C) Informing the Ambassador of his intention to attend the March 2 donors' conference on Gaza reconstruction in Sharm el Sheikh, Siniora said he planned to participate and would also present Lebanon's case regarding Nahr al-Barid reconstruction. He expressed his hope to meet the Secretary and other officials of the new U.S. administration. Siniora disclosed that the GOL still had not received Saudi pledges for Nahr al-Barid construction and that while the Omanis reportedly increased their pledge from five to seven million dollars, it had not received Omani payments either.

GHAJAR

16. (C) Siniora reported that he had not had a Ghajar update since learning of the February 11 Israeli technical team visit (reftel). Ambassador asked whether PM Siniora might endorse broader talks with Israel if Ghajar were resolved. This might expedite IDF withdrawal, she noted. A meeting of the Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission, inactive since

BEIRUT 00000232 002.2 OF 002

1996, or agreement to raise the topic of a renewed armistice via the IDF-LAF-UNIFIL trilateral arrangement after withdrawal might be two possibilities, she said. Siniora asked his aide, Roula Nouredine, to take note of the Mixed Armistice Commission mention and to look into the issue.

BERRI'S AMBITIONS FUELING  
CRITICISM AGAINST U.S.

17. (C) According to Siniora, recent claims in the local press that the USG was interfering in his dispute with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri over Council of the South's budget were merely a ploy by Berri to boost his own popularity. "The more Berri stirs up anti-U.S. sentiment, the more likely he will retain his office as speaker," Nouredine surmised.

18. (C) Though unaware of Berri's upcoming trip to Iran (planned to follow the visit to Tehran by Industry Minister Ghazi Zoayter, from Berri's Amal party, February 21-24), Siniora commented that he was not surprised. He added that such a visit would be a further attempt by Berri to drum up electoral support by currying favor with an opponent of the United States.

99 PERCENT "NOT RUNNING"  
FOR DEPUTY SLOT IN SIDON

19. (C) Commenting on pressure placed upon him to run in the parliamentary elections in his hometown of Sidon, Siniora stressed that he had never considered this notion on his own. He declared, "I am 99 percent sure I will not run!" (Comment: He left the door ajar on the matter, with the one percent opening. We would not discount such a move. End comment.)

SISON